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ABSTRACT

The Council on Diversity in Extension was created as an advisory council for the Cooperative Extension System. The council's first meeting was devoted to providing feedback on a draft document titled "Pathway to Diversity: The Strategic Plan for the Cooperative Extension System's Emphasis on Diversity." This report of the highlights of that meeting is a combination summary of the council's major conclusions and sampling of relevant quotations and suggestions presented at the meeting. It is divided into three parts. The first part, entitled "The Pathway to Diversity: Commitment and Choices," covers the rationale for diversity, the lack of any quick fixes, personal development and empowerment, management strategies, and the importance of celebrating diversity. The second part, "The Cooperative Extension System Diversity Plan" focuses on dealing with the extension's goal, its "hook," its basic philosophy about diversity, a historical perspective on diversity, and the ways in which people are held accountable. Finally, in "Closing Thoughts," series of seven brief closing pieces of advice concludes the report. (MN)

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Valuing Differences and Celebrating Diversity

A Report of the Council on Diversity in Extension to the Cooperative Extension System

August 1991

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Council on Diversity in Extension

The Council on Diversity in Extension (CDE) was created by the Extension Committee on Organization & Policy (ECOP) and Extension Service-U.S. Department of Agriculture (ES-USDA) as a response to recommendations in the Task Force on Diversity Report, *"Addressing Diversity in the 1990s and Beyond: CES Can Make a Difference."* CDE, an external advisory council for the Cooperative Extension System (CES), was charged with reporting annually to ECOP and ES-USDA on the status of diversity in Extension, and on actions needed to move the diversity effort forward. The 12 Council members represent organizations with a demonstrated commitment to diversity. This group met for the first time in Washington, DC, on July 11 and 12, 1991.

Council members came to the meeting charged with their initial task of giving Extension feedback on its draft document, *"Pathway to Diversity, the Strategic Plan for the Cooperative Extension System's Emphasis on Diversity."* They were also asked to share their expertise with CES by providing suggestions based on successful diversity efforts within their own organizations.

The following report summarizes highlights of that first meeting. **Edith P. Thomas,** National Program Leader—Organization Development, ES-USDA, facilitated the Council's dynamic discussion. **Eileen Conlon,** Extension Educator, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, and **Patricia Calvert,** Deputy Director, Communication, Information, and Technology, ES-USDA, worked with the Council to record this important meeting and write this report.

This gathering was high spirited and energizing. Council members showed enormous commitment and integrity. The ideas generated were exciting and confirming for those in Extension who witnessed and participated in the process. By capturing these ideas in this report, they will have broader use for the entire Extension organization--as together we share the excitement and challenge of being part of this pioneering effort.

Council on Diversity in Extension Membership

Mary Lou Arey, Manager of Organizational Planning and Development, DuPont Company, Wilmington, DE

Kevin Cranston, AIDS/Health Education Consultant, Massachusetts Department of Education, Quincy, MA

Kim Cromwell, Corporate Valuing Differences Consultant, Digital Equipment Corporation, Maynard, MA

Chavez John, Inter-Tribal Agricultural Council, Yatahey, NM

Marygrace Ohab, Manager, Workforce Diversity Programs, Motorola Inc., Phoenix, AZ

Judith Palmer, Associate Director, Finance and Personnel, The Procter & Gamble Company, Cincinnati, OH

Kevin Slater, Training Specialist, Anti-Defamation League, New York, NY

Rosalyn Taylor-O'Neale *(not present)*, Independent Consultant, Santa Clara, CA

Billy J. Tidwell, Director of Research, National Urban League, Washington, DC

Magdalena (Millie) Torres, Communication Consultant, Lynbrook, NY

Barbara Walker, Vice President of Human Resources and Human Relations, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH

Wilford (Wil) Williams, District Manager, AT&T, Morristown, NJ

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The Pathway to Diversity: Commitment and Choices

The Council on Diversity shared many thoughts and ideas on what is working within the organizations they represent in the area of diversity; and the next steps that the Cooperative Extension System needs to consider on its *"Pathway to Diversity."*

Again and again, various Council members stressed the importance and ultimate benefit to all organizations—private and public—of an emphasis on diversity. To make this emphasis a reality, others stressed that a commitment to diversity is vitally important at all levels of the Extension organization: individuals, units, and by the leadership throughout the System.

Why an Emphasis on Diversity?

It is that link between the Emphasis on Diversity and the mission and goals of the organization that is so vital, the Council emphasized. The diversity effort needs to be viewed as *"A means for the Cooperative Extension System to accomplish its mission more effectively,"* for it to be given the weight it deserves. One member pointed out, *"One piece of the CES mission is to work with all members of our society and this emphasis on diversity is to help Extension achieve that."*

"Diversity is really a bottom line issue! Build an environment where everyone is valued; establish integrity; address issues relevant to all people. You are developing an organizational mindset that is courageous and not afraid of differences," one member emphasized.

"In my Company, we positioned diversity as a business issue so it receives equal priority to other things on people's plates," said another member.

The relevance of diversity to the organization's mission and vision was continually emphasized by Council members. *"Through diversity, CES is putting **people** back into the people organization!"* The Council thought it was important for leaders and managers to hear what the organization is like for people who are diverse. They suggested roundtable discussions and creation of a safe environment throughout the organization to openly discuss, and sometimes disagree, on issues of diversity.

"In the early days of the diversity effort in Dupont, we asked the question, 'Why aren't we doing better?' Yes, we're reaching our goals and making a profit, but clearly it's agreed we could be doing a lot better. Why, if our company is attracting the best and the brightest, aren't we doing better than we are? One answer was that we needed to attract a more diverse workforce and we needed to make full use of all our current employees' talents....It required our diversity effort to make this happen."

Mary Lou Arey

The time is right to do this work, said several Council members. But, be sure your diversity work becomes part of the fiber of the organization—not just a movement led by a few charismatic people.

One of the key questions for the Extension System was, *"Do you want to be the employer of choice?"*

There Are No Quick Fixes

"The value of the work is in the struggle...all of us—you and we—understand that the work we are doing (in diversity and valuing differences in others) is pioneering...a process of discovery. Through that process, people come up with ownership."

Barbara Walker

The Council focused its discussion on the value of the process of diversity: *"Diversity is part of the organization's fabric—is a relevant organizational value—an ongoing process."* Both leaders and staff need to be aware that the diversity vision is an unfolding one—there are no quick fixes. Typically, people in organizations want a checklist; they want *"pat"* answers and solutions. The work of diversity is often a painful process—very often it gets worse before it gets better!

One council member emphasized, *"What we're talking about is the how and not the what."* Another added: *"How you do the work of diversity is more important than what you do."* Ongoing dialogue is critical and through that dialogue what you need to do will emerge. *"You must prepare the organization for dialogue."*

Learning to value diversity does not mean attending one or two training sessions on diversity. You'll hear people say, *"Oh, yeah, I did diversity."* It's not that simple, it's a long-term change process that requires long-term commitment.

Personal Development and Empowerment

All members of the Council placed special emphasis on personal development and empowerment during their discussions and deliberations. The diversity emphasis is *"an opportunity to give voice to the voiceless and to accord everyone within the organization their just due."*

Doing the work of diversity within the organization is personally rewarding, self-actualizing, and a powerful experience for all involved. As one member said, *"Organizational development is really people development....Walk your talk; put your head and heart together and your feet will follow."* Another said, *"You have the ability to grow your own, to develop and train expertise from within, to build your own consortium."*

The work of diversity must be done with integrity and ethics, members stressed. *"If we're too busy with issues of race and gender that we don't have time for another person's illiteracy problem; that's not ethical,"* a member said.

Personal development opportunities are vital to integrating diversity into the organization. *"You can't tell people how to believe and think personally after they leave the work environment."* Diversity is about helping us all learn to be caring, said one Council member. *"We are empowering each other to care for anybody and everybody."*

There will always be new differences said one member. People need to be empowered so that they can deal with any difference. Individual Council members made many references to maintaining respect for the human dignity of all people...for removing preconceived perceptions of others...for not *"labeling"* people or groups of individuals. Another said, *"Make diversity the value, not the exception."*

Council members stressed the importance of valuing all human differences. *"Make all people feel valued,"* they stressed. *"If one person feels devalued, you will soon have two, then four, who feel devalued."*

"In our company we started with understanding ourselves," one member shared, *"then we brought in 500-600 people in small groups and gave them permission to tell the truth."*

"Unless people are part of the process, there will be no ownership of it....Listen and hear each other; we're not far apart in the goal of how we want to be treated."

Kevin Slater

Another member suggested *"consciousness raising"* among employees to allow each individual to *"be their most courageous self. It's the impact of each individual that will have the impact on the organization's culture."*

Another member added that in his organization, they talk about three types of people:

- **Irritants**—those who bring attention to an issue
- **Advocates**—those who bring information to an issue
- **Champions**—those who bring value to an issue.

"You need these people in efforts such as this one. Are these types of people welcome in your organization?" he asked. Do employees feel empowered to speak the truth, even when it is difficult for others to hear?

"Speaking the truth can be especially difficult for one particular group. The protections that exist for other groups do not exist for people who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual. The work here is more like work done in the 1960's for other groups," one member emphasized. *"In most states, their jobs are not legally protected so I'd encourage advocacy for legal protections. Otherwise, it's often not safe for these members of your organization to speak. Empowerment for this group begins with very basic safety issues which require a base of legal protection."*

Management Strategies

"Strategic choices are important—it's all a matter of timing what you choose as an organization to do first."

Judith Palmer

The Council agreed that operationalizing the CES emphasis on diversity throughout the organization is a vital next step. Important to this beginning management strategy was listening—throughout the organization. *"Listen for all voices,"* said one Council member. *"If you only listen for one voice, that's all you'll hear."* Another Council member defined the emphasis on diversity as a *"continuous process of listening."* He emphasized, *"We're not far apart in the goal of how we want to be...listen, and hear each other."*

The Council strongly advised the Extension System to put mechanisms in place to make it (diversity) happen. Suggestions included the need for policy and supervisory systems, clear grievance procedures, human services, and a strong support system at every level of the organization. Several Council members suggested awareness training as a first priority: *"People need to get rid of real or perceived guilt."*

Another member cautioned. *"Don't do ethnic dinners and cultural dance festivals and call that your emphasis on diversity—that's just surface!"*

One Council member suggested CES treat diversity as an organizational asset: to support the diversity effort with both human and financial resources. *"I can tell you what doesn't work,"* he said. *"Executive letters, binders full of how-to's, and a corporate fixit attitude...these are endemic in most organizations."* Another member asked, *"Are you looking for systemic changes, or just surface changes?"*

"Job protection and equal access to employee benefits for all are vitally important," noted one Council member. Another suggested appointing staff and line operational managers for diversity; developing work spheres of influence; and creating a core center of influence for diversity within the CES organization. One member stressed the need to emphasize employee assistance programs, revise current policy and procedures, and appoint employee advisory groups. Another suggested inviting in panels of potential consumers and dialoguing about their needs.

Continually clarify and reinforce what your objectives are—*"Make sure your strategic plan isn't just a piece of paper,"* concluded another Council member. *"Make something happen...put a mechanism in place to deal with complaints, such as a Board, hotlines, staff committed to work on these issues, or an advocate for employees. Remember, the organization is not always right!"*

Executive/institutional commitment to diversity was continuallly stressed by the Council, and this commitment must filter down throughout the organization. As one Council member stated, *"Leadership must make clear to those on the front lines its commitment to integrating diversity throughout the organization and how this will affect daily operations."*

"Work together and celebrate the positives within your organization."

Kevin Slater

Time and again various Council members made reference to the value of the CES taking time out to celebrate the many positives already within the System in achieving and sustaining diversity. *"We've taken celebration out of the workplace,"* said one member. *"Celebration is an important part of human dignity."* *"Make this fun,"* another member encouraged, *"Have some celebrations in this work....Use this opportunity to reenergize the organization."* *"Celebration is a strategy and a vision,"* another member added.

"Take credit for what you've done....Maintain respect for what you're creating," emphasized another Council member. Communications at every level of the organization was also cited as an important element of the diversity emphasis. *"Tell people what you're doing positively,"* he said. *"Brag about what's working—it's all part of the ongoing communications and work of diversity within the organization."*

As one Council member summarized, *"Work together, then take time to celebrate!"*

The Cooperative Extension System Diversity Plan

The Council focused on the draft document *"Pathway to Diversity, the Strategic Plan for the Cooperative Extension System's Emphasis on Diversity"* by asking the questions: What do you like about the Plan? What is troublesome about the Plan? And, what is missing? Out of that discussion, some common threads repeatedly emerged; these are highlighted below.

What's Extension's Goal?

A great deal of attention was focused on the goal of the Emphasis on Diversity as the Council members shared their thoughts and ideas. As one member put it, *"What kind of difference are you trying to achieve? There are three different directions to choose from, and Extension must make a clear choice."* Your goal can be:

- To achieve traditional Affirmative Action (AA) objectives of increasing numbers of people from specific targeted populations, primarily based on race and gender;
- To increase diversity in a broader sense, for example, as defined in your Plan, which is more inclusive, but still focuses on increasing numbers; or
- To optimize the **valuing** of diversity.

"Since there are different strategies for different goals, it is vitally important to decide what the goal is and then choose your strategies accordingly," she emphasized.

Others supported this idea and noted that the CES Plan seems to vacillate between the goal of diversity, which still focuses on numbers, and the goal of pluralism, which is about the **valuing** of **diversity**.

It is possible to have more than one goal, but Council members stressed the need to separate out each goal, not lump them together as if they are the same thing. *"It is possible to focus on one goal for a period of time and then address a different goal,"* suggested one member.

"As an organization, you are gearing up to deal with America as it is....This is why you are developing and delivering programs.... The spirit is here! If there were no spirit, there would be nothing to discuss!"

Kevin Slater

There was a strong sense within the group that it is the goal of valuing diversity that CES wants to be about. In the Plan, this is summed up in the definition of pluralism. If pluralism isn't a word that seems easy to identify with, then call it *"valuing diversity, appreciating diversity, leveraging diversity, whatever, but not just diversity,"* a Council member said.

This distinction is particularly important for organizations or units that may appear not to have much diversity. *"It is critical for all members of the group to recognize that this effort is for them, all of them. It is about respect for each individual as another human being,"* stressed one member. *"We are distinctive in culture, but not far apart on how we want to be treated."*

There was a strong sentiment among Council members that a solid Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity program needs to be in place along side any new diversity emphasis. Members spoke of these as often being an entree into diversity, but certainly not the same thing. *"Bringing people into the System is a different issue from the notion of valuing everyone who is in the System for the unique talents that each one brings,"* said one Council member.

In one member's organization, AA and Diversity efforts are located in the same unit and there is an interplay between the two. Sometimes there is a greater focus on achieving numbers (AA)—right now she is focusing more on valuing diversity efforts, but she knows that soon it will be important to look again at AA goals. This points out the real need for communication and cooperation between groups responsible for different goals.

Other members thought that valuing diversity should really be a program initiative or a base program, essentially, part of the CES educational program. Since the valuing of diversity is clearly a national concern, if Extension can do its own internal work well, then the System ought to be able to help other organizations, communities, and individuals address diversity issues as well. *"Make sure the shoemaker has shoes when you reform and examine your mission and vision."* Make sure your own house is in order before you take on diversity as a part of your educational mission, others suggested.

What's the Hook?

Council members suggested the Extension System, *"Take detail out and drive dialogue in. Leave some space for local CES organizations to fill in, the plan is too complete,"* they said. *"The struggle is a major part of the work; it's a process, not a product."*

"You don't need to have all the answers," suggested another member. *"Share more of your struggle."* Be more explicit about your problems and issues, the group suggested. Make it real to your organization.

Extension may, *"need to name the 'isms;' if that is a big thing you are talking about it should not be touched on lightly once."* The Council felt *"code words"* and vague language only clouded the issue and made it more difficult to grasp the essence of the concern. *"Say exactly what you mean"* was a solid message from the group.

"This sort of document can be overwhelming, people need to be given a place to start. When looking at a document like this, you need that place to hook on, to connect," they stressed.

"The CES Plan said so much I wondered if it said anything. Where's the juice? Where's the energy? Where's the fire? What's the hook for your organization?"

Wil Williams

What is Your Basic Philosophy About Diversity?

The Council praised the Plan for addressing the external environment, but wanted to see more connection between the changing environment and why Extension is initiating this effort. *"How do these changing societal forces impact CES and consequently require this new emphasis?"* they asked. Why, in short, is valuing diversity so important? Why are you doing this?

"Land on one or two pieces," said another member speaking about the values section. *"You need to distill those down to a short powerful message about what you value as a part of your overall philosophy."*

Clear values, another member argued, are not necessary, but they do provide, *"a core of sameness to make it safe to discuss differences."*

In my organization, one member stressed, *"We talked about valuing **all** differences and that was very important, in our work. However, we defined valuing as 'moving toward,' not necessarily embracing, but caring enough to look at it. We felt it was very important to value all differences."*

"You must decide what you will hold dear. Is it honesty, openness, trust, authenticity? Clarify the values piece and then let others within your organization plan how to carry those values out."

Mary Lou Arey

Other organizations did not use the word *"all,"* but were careful to use very inclusive definitions of diversity. As an organization these are the types of issues CES must struggle with as it articulates its philosophy, agreed the Council members.

The definition of diversity stated in the Plan was found to be *"refreshingly inclusive."* There were concerns about updating some language, and making sure there is consistency in language throughout the document; however, the way diversity was defined was seen to be a really healthy direction.

Where's the Historical Perspective?

"So much involves the culture of the organization....You need a prior history; ...to acknowledge where you are... before saying where you are going."

Wil Williams

As the Extension System puts forth a Plan for the future, it's important to acknowledge the past. One member suggested that the System needs to include a historical perspective: *"Where did you come from, how did you arrive here?"*

Others agreed Extension needs to appreciate what people have already been doing. To not mention what has already occurred, discounts important steps that have been made. *"Be attentive to what those are throughout the System,"* members said.

How Are People Held Accountable?

"If you are looking for changes in attitudes and behaviors, then you cannot look only at numbers. Much of the evaluation are people's stories...for example, a person sharing with me that they now like working here. Those changes need to be documented."

Wil Williams

It's critical that evaluation be a part of every step in the Plan, Council members stressed. Measurements and accountabilities need to be spelled out. *"Valuing diversity needs to become a part of the fabric of the organization. When it's the norm, then people who are promoted or receive rewards are the ones who are doing it right,"* said one member. *"In some cases, things may start to look worse before they get better. In our organization, complaints went up after the effort in diversity began, most likely due to people feeling freer to speak up about problems they had previously kept quiet about. It's important to be prepared for that and not be surprised by it."*

Timelines can also be useful in keeping the effort on track, and in creating points where you can celebrate what you've accomplished, said one Council member. *"It's a long-term process; so it's essential to look back periodically and celebrate your successes."*

Closing Thoughts

"Emphasizing Diversity is a continuous process...and you are not in this alone; it's a big boat!"
—Kevin Slater

"Diversity work is an opportunity to give voice to the voiceless."
—Kevin Cranston

"Morale building is what diversity is all about....We are going to do more within our organization."
—Chavez John

"Small victories count, little things count—that's what our employees tell us."
—Marygrace Ohab

"You have to take credit for what you have already done."
—Millie Torres

"Communicate in every possible way. We made mistakes by waiting to communicate until we had it all figured out. You don't ever have it all figured out."
—Kim Cromwell

"Opportunities are flying at us. How do we exploit them?"
—Billy Tidwell

With these final remarks, members of the Council on Diversity in Extension encouraged the Cooperative Extension System to continue on its pathway to diversity. CDE members acknowledged the work that has brought the System this far, and offered their continuing support as the Extension Organization finalizes and follows through on the Strategic Plan for the CES Emphasis on Diversity.

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